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ABSTRACT

A summary of studies on sexism in books leads to the conclusion that nonsexist books should be included in the elementary curriculum so that children can be exposed to a variety of lifestyles and career options. Various checklists and guidelines for evaluating the sex fairness of reading materials are available. Activities that can be used to promote uniqueness and individuality in children include coordinating speakers and activities with story readings, having children listen to stories and perform the activities in class (cooking, crocheting), conducting art appreciation activities, using puppetry to dramatize stories, having career fairs, creating sports displays, conducting cleanup activities after reading "The Man Who Didn't Wash His Dishes," and making greater classroom use of biographies about women. Since the educational system is a major socialization factor for children, it should be supportive of each child's uniqueness. Such support means heightening children's awareness of their individual potential and power. (A bibliography and a list of references are attached.) (RL)

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Sexism and Ten Techniques To Combat it through Children's Books

by Beth Snee

Educators are increasingly aware of their responsibility to uphold non-sexist standards for the children they teach as stated in Title IX and the Equal Rights Amendment. Teachers who want to break out of the patterns of differential treatment for girls and boys need to select and to use books in which both boys and girls are portrayed as having a wide range of options with respect to sex roles. Children should see themselves first as children rather than as girls or boys. In other words, books should be chosen so that neither girls nor boys are exposed to stereotypical roles. In order to determine whether nonsexist roles are being portrayed in books, this author reviewed the studies on sexism in children's books.

Review of Studies on Sexism

A recent study from the University of Mississippi yielded some pessimistic findings about children's perceptions of sex roles (Drabman, Hammer, Jarvie, 1976). According to this study, the sex role stereotypes common to society may be so deeply ingrained by the time a child enters school that subsequent attempts to change them will be negligible. On the other hand, a Ford Foundation study indicated that there is an essential malleability of sex role concepts, and that change is possible (Guttentag and Bray, 1976). The authors of this study claim that the educational system can intervene and change behavior by modifying the rigidity of children's sex role stereotypes, by using books and other curriculum materials which demonstrate that women can be competent and skilled at occupations which they choose and that men can be enriched by

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espousing traditionally "feminine" qualities like sensitivity and gentleness. The critical factor is that the intervention should be thorough, well-rounded, and intense.

In response to the growing concerns of educators regarding sex-stereotyped books and school materials, certain states have taken legislative action. California, Iowa, and New Jersey legislators have passed laws against sex-biased school materials. State Boards of education in Colorado, Maryland, New Jersey, South Dakota, and West Virginia have proposed or passed resolutions against sex-biased materials (Carmichael, 1977). At least one state department of education (Pennsylvania) has published a Self-Study Guide to Sexism in Schools (1975).

School materials, in this case, specifically books, convey impressions to children. Many times these impressions do not parallel reality but perpetuate stereotypes. Because this stereotyping is so prevalent, it seems likely that children internalize as true and accurate the roles that are presented in books.

One has only to browse through a school library to find examples of children's books which portray children in confining and restrictive roles. In one example, I'm Glad I'm a Boy! I'm Glad I'm a Girl! (Darrow, 1970), captions under large cartoon figures announce: "Boys are doctors, pilots, policemen, and Presidents..." "Girls are nurses, stewardesses, metermaids, and First Ladies..." Why aren't boys and girls both portrayed as doctors and nurses or pilots and flight attendants just as they are in real life? Another book, The ABC's of Being a Girl (McGinley, 1960), delightfully describes "things from A to Z that belong to girls." One wonders why these "things", such as aprons, doll houses, and irons are portrayed as the exclusive property of girls.

Other books which perpetuate stereotypes are Daddies, What They Do All Day (Peiner, 1946), The Real Mother Goose (Wright, 1916), If I Were A Mother (Mizmurma, 1968), The Very Little Girl (Krasilovsky, 1963), and Mr. Popper's Penquins (Atwater, 1938).

Children's readers also convey sexist stereotyping. A study made by an organization called Women on Words and Images (1972) reported the following statistics based on 2,760 stories in 134 basal texts from fourteen publishers.

	Ratio
Boy-centered stories to girl-centered stories	5:2
Adult male main characters to adult female main characters	3:1
Male biographies to female biographies	6:1
Male animal stories to female animal stories	2:1
Male folk or fantasy stories to female folk or fantasy stories	4:1

This study suggests that males are depicted overwhelmingly more than females in all kinds of literature.

Later studies by others did not reveal much improvement. Britton found minority females represented in twenty different reading series in only three percent of the stories while "Anglo" females were represented in thirteen percent of the stories (1975). Marten and Matlin (1976) compared recent texts with those published before 1971. They concluded that females are shown slightly more often in illustrations and as main characters, but the nature of their activities has not changed substantially in recent years.

Some educators believed that the textbook industry guidelines published between 1972 and 1975 (Scott, Foresman and Company, 1972; Ginn and Company, 1973; McGraw Hill, 1974; Houghton Mifflin, 1975) would rectify the unequal treatment

of women. However, bias in textbooks continues. Before the guidelines were printed (1958-1970) females were represented as major characters in fourteen percent of the stories. After the guidelines (1974-1976) females were represented in sixteen percent of the stories (Britton and Lumpkin, 1971). A quantitative analysis of 16,176 stories in forty-nine reading, literature, and social studies series documented evidence that the guidelines are not being honored by the very publishers who wrote them (Britton, 1977).

Award winning children's books did not fare any better than children's readers. Nilson (1971) studied the winners and runners-up of the Caldecott Award from 1951-1971. The number of girls pictured dropped from forty-six percent in the 1951-1955 period to twenty-six percent in the 1966-1971 period. A team of researchers conducted an intensive analysis of Caldecott winners and runners-up from 1967-1972 and found an eleven to one ratio of males pictured versus females pictured (Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, and Ross, 1972).

If educators are concerned with portraying life in reality rather than in fantasy, then books ought to show women as members of the work force, as heads of households, as professionals, and as people who are active and versatile. Luckenbill found in a random sample of library books that women are portrayed as weak, unassuming individuals with little identity outside their homes (1974). Dolan selected nursery rhymes and folk tales as part of his study and concluded that women are either "ineffectual creatures who need to be dominated by men or are aggressive monsters who must be destroyed by men" (1972). Stewig and Higgs found that eighty-three percent of the women in their sample of picture books were homemakers while seventeen percent of the women shown in a professional role were either teachers or maids (1973).

Although male stereotyping is not within the realm of this paper to explore, it must be realized that sometimes male stereotypes are also projected in books. In the future, research is needed to answer these questions about male stereotyping: Is a male permitted to be a whole person? Is he permitted the range of emotions that all humans should have in their repertoire? Must he always be aggressive? Must he be taller and stronger than his female friends? Must he be athletic? Is he permitted to enjoy music and art? Is he allowed to make mistakes and still be accepted?

The studies quoted in this article lead to the conclusion that if children are to be presented with a variety of lifestyles and career options, then nonsexist books should be included in the curriculum. The same kind of sensitivity should be displayed toward females as a group as toward any other group in society; that is, the same attention should be paid to avoiding common stereotypes of occupations or behavior.

Criteria by Which to Judge Books

In order to utilize nonsexist books, teachers must have some criteria by which to judge them. The following criteria taken from an article by Pamela Giller (1976) were used in judging the books recommended in this paper.

1. A full participation by females in physical and intellectual activities.
2. Female characters leading active, independent lives.
3. Girls dealing with a variety of choices and aspiring to diverse goals.
4. Male characters respecting female characters and relating to them as equals.
5. Male characters exhibiting a wide range of interests and emotions.

A longer checklist has been published by the International Reading Association: "Guide for Evaluating Sex Stereotypes in Reading Materials" (Committee on Sexism and Reading, 1977). It is available from the IRA Headquarters. This checklist is an invaluable aid in helping teachers analyze books for sex stereotypes.

Nonsexist Books and Activities

One of the available checklists should provide a resource for the teacher in order to find the books s/he would like to use as teaching aids. The following books and activities are offered as specific suggestions for incorporating nonsexist books into the school curriculum.

- Speakers. Invite guests who have had similar experiences as characters in a book. Women who are bank tellers, train conductors, librarians, scientists, and factory workers are depicted in the book Mommies at Work (Merriam, 1961). When over forty-one percent of our nation's civilian work force are women (Bureau of Census, 1978), there certainly should be some women willing to visit the classroom and discuss their vocations. Traditionally, men have been invited to the classroom to discuss their vocations and they are still welcome as guests. By inviting both sexes, children will be able to identify with "people at work" rather than males and females in stereotypical vocations.

- Listen and Do. Children may want to grow their own plants after hearing The Plant Sitter (Zion, 1975). Girls and boys alike may want to crochet after hearing Peter Learns to Crochet (Levinson, 1976).

- Cooking Activities. Children enjoy cooking, and there are several nonsexist books which may motivate them to prepare food in the classroom. Young children will enjoy making and eating jam sandwiches after hearing Bread and Jam for Frances (R. Hoban, 1964). Cooking is "in" for boys in Arthur's Christmas

Cookies (L. Hoban, 1972). The children may sympathize with the inedible Christmas cookies which the chimps bake and might want to try baking some of their own. Sam (Scott, 1967) is the story of a small boy who learns how to bake a raspberry tart and it should encourage young readers to try to bake their own.

• Art Activities and Art Appreciation. Children will delight in discussing the picture details in ABC Workbook (Mangi, 1975), which depicts Eugenia, the Engineer; Margaret, the Mechanic; and Victor and Valerie playing volleyball. After reading From the Mixed Up File of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler (Koningsberg, 1967), children may plan to visit a local art museum.

• Puppetry. The book, Puppets for Beginners (Jagendorf, 1952) relates how to make various kinds of puppets. If the children view the stage play or movie, "The Wiz," they may want to make puppets of the characters and stage their own production. For more background, they may be encouraged to read The Wizard of Oz (Baum, 1908).

• Career Fair. Books such as the series entitled What Can She Be? (Goldreich, 1973) might be included in the fair. Among the possibilities of vocations listed are architect, lawyer, newscaster, veterinarian, and musician. These books may set the stage for discussing other career options for women.

• Sports Displays. Title IX has given girls an impetus to do their best at sports. There are various women's sports biographies available which would interest boys as well as girls. These books could be prominently displayed along with photos of sports stars and sports equipment. Another interesting sports book is Not Bad for a Girl (Taves, 1972), which relates the true story of a little girl who prefers baseball to dolls.

• Cleanup Activities. Units which deal with everyday cleanup will be enhanced by using the following books: The Man Who Didn't Wash His Dishes (Krasilovsky, 1950), a story of the mess a man gets into when he doesn't keep

his house clean, and Litterbugs Come in Every Size (Smaridge, 1972), a depiction of the behavior of "neatos" and "litterbugs".

• Biographical Studies. In recent years there has been an answer to the demand for more biographies of women. Some which can be used in the classroom are the award winning Harriet and the Promised Land (Lawrence, 1968), Shirley Chisholm (Brownmiller, 1970), Marie Curie (McKown, 1971), Girl Soldier and Spy: Sarah Emma Edmundson (Hoehling, 1959), and Women of Courage (Nathan, 1964), which details the lives of Susan B. Anthony, Jane Addames, Mary McLeod Bethune, Amelia Earhart, and Margaret Mead. These biographies, as well as male biographies, should be included in the school library.

The books recommended in this article were chosen because they embody diversity in thought, feelings, and actions which stereotypes ignore. There are many other books which represent androgynous characters. Lists of these books may be found in Little Miss Muffet Fights Back (1974) by the Feminists on Children's Media. It is available for a nominal fee from the Feminists Book Mart, Box 149, Whitestone, New York. Two other lists are Guide to Non-Sexist Children's Books (1975) by Judith Adell and Hilary Klein, Academy Press Ltd., 360 N. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, and Choices for Models: Images in Trade Books (1978) by Dr. Shirley Ernst, Lewis Clark State College.

Summary

This paper serves as a summary of studies on sexism in books. This author has suggested books and methods to use in promoting uniqueness and individuality in children. The educational system is a major socialization factor for children; therefore, it should be supportive of each child's uniqueness. To accomplish this, changes must be made in all phases of education, including the reading curriculum. Teachers can help to make these changes. If they accept that

responsibility, they can be powerful agents for change. Perhaps teachers will have the desire and the courage to try and free themselves from confining roles and in turn voice the refrain from He Bear, She Bear (Berenstain, 1974):

> We can do all these
> things
> you see
> Whether we are he or
> she.

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